

THE MIDDLE TEMPLE MURDER

A Detective Story by J. S. Fletcher

"VERY good," said the proprietor, "Go on." But Spargo intervened. "Did you ever hear the name of the gentleman who took the boy away?" he asked.

"Yes, I did," replied Mrs. Gutch. "Of course I did. Which it was Elphick."

CHAPTER XXVI
Still Silent

SPARGO dropped his pen on the desk before him with a sharp clatter that made Mrs. Gutch jump. A steady devotion to the bottle had made her nerves to be none of the strongest, and she looked at the starter of them with wary malevolence.

"Don't do that again, young man!" she exclaimed sharply. "I can't bear to be jumped out of my skin, and it's bad manners. I observed that the gentleman's name was Elphick."

Spargo contrived to get in a glance at his proprietor and his editor—a glance which came near to being a wink.

"Just so—Elphick," he said. "A law gentleman I think you said, Mrs. Gutch?"

"I said," answered Mrs. Gutch, "as how he looked like a lawyer. But since you're so particular, young man, though I wasn't addressing you but your principals, he was a lawyer gentleman. One of the sort that wears wig and gown—didn't I see his picture in Jane Baylis's room at the boarding house where you saw her this morning?"

"Elderly he will be now," replied the informant; "but when he took the boy away he was a middle-aged man. About his age," she added, pointing to the editor in a fashion which made that worthy man wince and the proprietor desire to laugh unbecomingly, and not so very unlike him neither, being as he had no hair on his face."

"Ah!" said Spargo. "And where did this Mr. Elphick take the boy, Mrs. Gutch?"

But Mrs. Gutch shook her head.

"Ain't no idea," she said. "He took him. Then, as I told you, Maitland came, and Jane Baylis told him that the boy was dead. And after that she never ever told me anything about the boy. She kept a tight tongue. Once or twice I asked her, and she says, 'Never mind, she says, 'be as old as Methusalem.' And she never said more, and I never said more. But," continued Mrs. Gutch, whose black-bank was empty, and who began to wipe tears away, "she's treated me hard as Jane Baylis, never allowing me a little comfort such as a lady of my age should be given."

"I hear the two of you talking this morning the other side of that grivet hedge, thinks I. 'Now's the time to have my knife in my hand, my friend! And I hope I do it.'"

Spargo looked at the editor and the proprietor, nodding his head slightly. He meant them to understand that he had got all he wanted from Mother Gutch.

"What are you going to do, Mrs. Gutch, when you leave here?" he asked. "You shall be driven straight back to Bayswater, if you like."

"Which I shall be obliged for, young man," said Mrs. Gutch, "and like wise for the first week of my annuity, and will call every Saturday for the same at 11 o'clock, or can be pointed to me on a Friday, whichever is agreeable to you gentlemen. And having my first week in my purse, and being driven to Bayswater, I shall take my boxes and go to a friend of mine where I shall be heartily welcome, shaking the dust of my feet off against Jane Baylis, and where I've been living with her."

"Yes, but, Mrs. Gutch," said Spargo, with some anxiety, "if you go back there tonight, you'll be very careful not to tell Miss Baylis that you've been here and told us all this?"

Mrs. Gutch rose, dignified and composed.

"Young man," she said, "you mean well, but you ain't used to dealing with ladies. I can keep my tongue as still as anybody when I like. I wouldn't tell Jane Baylis my affairs—my new affairs, gentlemen, thanks to you—not for two annuities, paid twice a week!"

"Take Mrs. Gutch downstairs, Spargo, and see her all right, and then come to my room," said the editor. "And don't you forget, Mrs. Gutch—keep a

quiet tongue in your head—no more talk—or there'll be no annuities on Saturday mornings."

"So Spargo took Mother Gutch to the cashier's department and paid her first week's money, and he got her a taxi and paid for it, and saw her depart, and then he went to the editor's room, strangely thoughtful. The editor and the proprietor were talking, but they stopped when Spargo entered and looked at him eagerly.

"I think we've done it," said Spargo quietly.

"What, precisely, have we found out?" asked the editor.

"A great deal more than I'd anticipated," answered Spargo, "and I don't know what fields it doesn't open out. If you look back, you'll remember that the only thing found on Marbury's body was a scrap of gray paper on which was a name and address—Ronald Breton, King's Bench Walk."

"Well?"

"Breton is a young barrister. Also he writes a bit—I have accepted two or three articles of his for our literary page."

"Well?"

"Further, he is engaged to Miss Aylmore, the eldest daughter of Aylmore, the member of Parliament who has been charged at Bow street today with the murder of Marbury."

"I know. Well, what then, Spargo?"

"But the most important matter," continued Spargo, speaking very deliberately, "is this—that is, taking that old woman's statement to be true, as I personally believe it is, that Breton, as he has told me himself (I have seen a good deal of him) was brought up by a guardian. That guardian is Mr. Septimus Elphick, the barrister."

The proprietor and the editor looked at each other. Their faces were the expression of men thinking on the same lines and arriving at the same conclusion. And the proprietor suddenly turned on Spargo with a sharp interrogation: "You think then—"

Spargo nodded.

"I think that Mr. Septimus Elphick is the Elphick, and that Breton is the young Maitland of whom Mrs. Gutch has been talking," he answered.

The editor got up, thrust his hands in his pockets, and began to pace the room.

"If that's so," he said, "if that's so, the mystery deepens. What do you propose to do, Spargo?"

"I think," said Spargo, slowly, "I think that without telling him anything of what we have learnt, I should like to see young Breton and get an introduction from him to Mr. Elphick. I can make a good excuse for wanting an interview with him. If you will leave it in my hands—"

"Yes, yes," said the proprietor, waving a hand. "Leave it entirely in Spargo's hands."

"Keep me informed," said the editor. "Do what you think. It strikes me you're on the track."

Spargo left their presence, and, going back to his own room, still faintly red with the personality of Mrs. Gutch, got hold of the reporter who had been present at Bow street when Aylmore was brought up that morning. There was nothing new; the authorities had merely asked for another remand. So far as the reporter knew, Aylmore had nothing fresh to anybody.

Spargo went round to the Temple and up to Ronald Breton's chambers. He found the young barrister just preparing to leave, and looking unusually grave and thoughtful. At sight of Spargo he turned back from his outer door, beckoned the journalist to follow him, and led him into an inner room.

"I say, Spargo," he said, as he motioned his visitor to take a chair, "this is becoming something more than serious. You know what you told me to do yesterday as regards Aylmore?"

"To get him to tell all—yes," said Spargo.

Breton shook his head.

"Stratton—his solicitor, you know—and I saw him this morning before the police court when he was continued. I told him of my talk with you; I even went as far as to tell him that his daughter had been to the Watchman office. Stratton and I both begged him to take your advice and tell all, everything, no matter at what cost to his private feelings. We pointed out to him the serious nature of the evidence against him; how he had damaged himself by not telling the whole truth at once; how he had certainly done a great deal to excite suspicion against himself; how, as the evidence stands at present, any jury could scarcely do less than convict him. And it was all no good, Spargo."

"He won't say anything?"

"No," said Spargo.

(CONTINUED MONDAY)

THE GUMPS—Oh, Hum! What's \$10,000?



PETEY—Just Waste of Time, That's All



The Young Lady Across the Way



Aunt Eppie Hogg, the Fattest Woman in Three Counties



"CAP" STUBBS—THAT'S LOGICAL



SOMEbody'S STENOGRAPHER—Prepaid



DOROTHY DARNIT—Danger Was Just Bubbling Over



DREAMLAND ADVENTURES THE FLYING FROGS

By DADDY

(Peggy and Billy, going with Bally Sam to Birdland, find the flying frogs in the nests of the birds. The frogs pretend to have magic and scare Bally Sam away.)

CHAPTER VI
The Flying Frogs Fly

BALKY SAM fled swiftly, madly through the woods. He wanted to get far, far away from the supposed magic of the feathered flying frogs. And Judge Owl, who was also afraid of the magic charm in the bulging, goggle eyes of the frogs, was urging him to go faster. Judge Owl couldn't see well in the day-time, and he thought the maple sirup kettle in which the frogs were making themselves sticky was a magic kettle turning them into real flying frogs. He hadn't noticed the torn feather-bed where the frogs were getting their borrowed feathers.

Peggy and Billy couldn't stop Bally Sam until he was almost at the edge of the woods. Then they told him and Judge Owl what they had seen through the crack in the sugar-maker's shed, and how the flying frogs were only regular frogs with feathers stuck on them.

Peggy and Billy thought it was a good joke on them, but Bally Sam was mad clear through when he found that the flying frogs were just jumping frogs and that their bulging, goggle eyes were not magic-making eyes, but only regular frog eyes.

And Judge Owl was mad, too. He had been shut up for three days by the flying frogs, and during those three days he had been very hungry and much worried over what was going to happen to him.

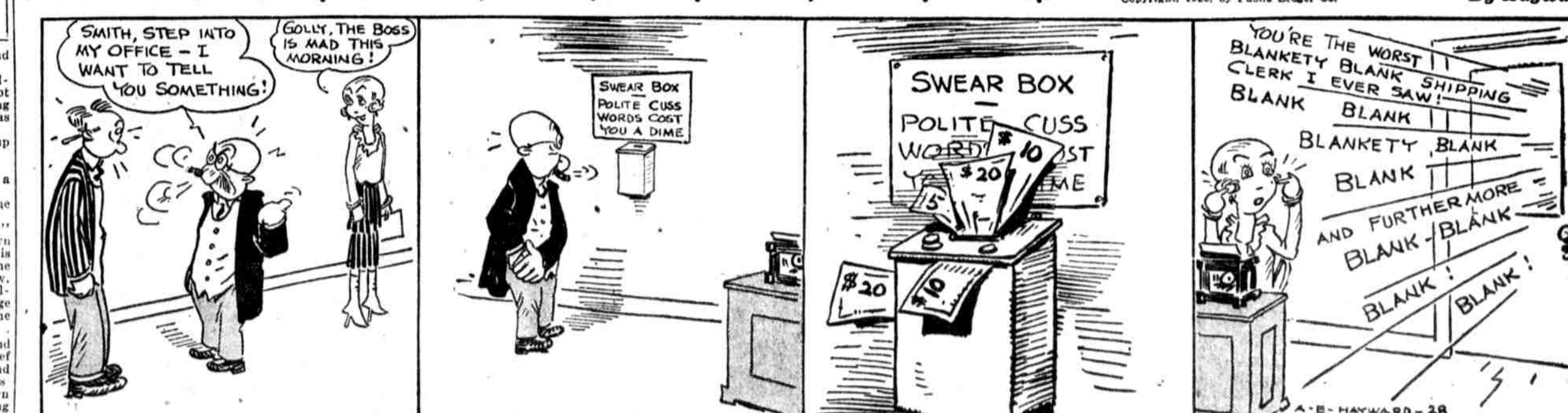
"I'll eat 'em," he hooted. "I never ate a frog before, but I'm hungry enough to eat an alligator."

"Hee-haw! I'll show 'em what it means to scare an army mule," brayed Bally Sam, and he raced back to the sugar camp as fast as he had fled away from it.

No frogs were in sight, for they had all been changed into flying frogs and had gone to Chief Fretful Frog in the nests of the birds. But Bally Sam didn't know this, and in trying to find them he banged down the door of the shed and then kicked around inside until he had smashed over the maple sirup kettle and sent feathers flying through the air.

A fine shower of sirup sprayed Peggy, Billy and Bally Sam. The flying feathers settled on this sticky spray, and the first thing they all knew Bally Sam had been changed into a feathered

SOMEbody'S STENOGRAPHER—Prepaid



DOROTHY DARNIT—Danger Was Just Bubbling Over

